

February 27, 2023

Appropriations Committee

**H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

**Molly Deegan**

Senator Hartley, Representative Gibson, and Connecticut General Assembly members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Molly Deegan and I am from Hartford, Connecticut. Today, I am writing on the proposed budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025, concerning the Department of Agriculture. I respectfully ask for your support in funding the CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program with an appropriation of 1 million dollars annually.

I write as both a resident and an employee at Hartford Public Schools where I serve as a Resident Scientist at Environmental Sciences Magnet School at Mary Hooker. Through the funding, I was able to collaborate with Lauren Little Edutainment, a Hartford-based environmental education organization, to develop and execute a new program called the 'Traveling Schoolyard Tour,' intended to educate youth on urban agriculture in Hartford. The students loved the lessons and activities that took place thanks to this funding. We started seeds in the spring, harvested in the fall, and taste-tested freshly picked produce throughout. We practiced farmer's market shopping (with Hartford growers' products) in October, and still have a local urban agriculture field trip planned to end the program this June. The goal is this: to teach CT kids that CT agriculture is something we are *all* connected to, and that we are *all* able to engage with our food system, no matter where we live and who we are. If we want to support our hard working local farmers and raise our kids to be healthy adults (both physically and mentally), we need to educate in a hands-on way that makes this connection we all have with our food system plain to see through experience.

Farm to school may be considered to some as extraneous or not as clearly important to the goals of administering an education. But I would strongly argue otherwise, as I see farm to school as a strategy to embed within the framework of a comprehensive, effective education

that meets the needs of the future our children will be growing into. Farm to school encompasses much more than a lesson on how seeds grow or what a farmer does. For example, when we teach lessons for our middle school students in the garden, they are immediately more engaged learners. They practice using their senses, they collaborate more naturally with one another, all the while, making a relationship to the world around them. As a result, they constantly beg to be out in the garden because it is considered a place of joy. A ten week [study](#) of sixth graders aged 11-12 years old was published in April 2021 out of the Department of Didactics in Biology, University of Rostock, in Rostock, Germany which validates my eyewitness accounts. The study found, “pupils showed more socially competent behavior in school garden lessons than in classroom lessons. The school garden lessons seem to create favorable incentives for social learning... it can be assumed that learning activities in school gardens can promote emotional and social competence.” (I’ve included graphs from that study that help to illustrate this.) This, from my five years working with students in school gardens, is exactly what I see. Time spent learning in the garden is time well spent, especially during a period of national emergency in child and adolescent mental health, as declared by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children’s Hospital Association in 2021.

This resource for schools is invaluable. These projects are tangible community-generated and community-building solutions to problems that feel insurmountable and one day will be, if we choose not to act. This funding allows citizens to act. I’ve heard before, hope is like a memory. And I remember last May with Lauren, seeding carrots with our students. Boys were placing tiny seeds delicately into the earth, girls were walking around excitedly with worms wiggling between their dirty fingers. The sun shone on our backs. We didn’t feel hopeless. We thought we could take the world into our hands and make something grow. And we did. I hope the state of Connecticut can feel like that too. Thank you for your time.

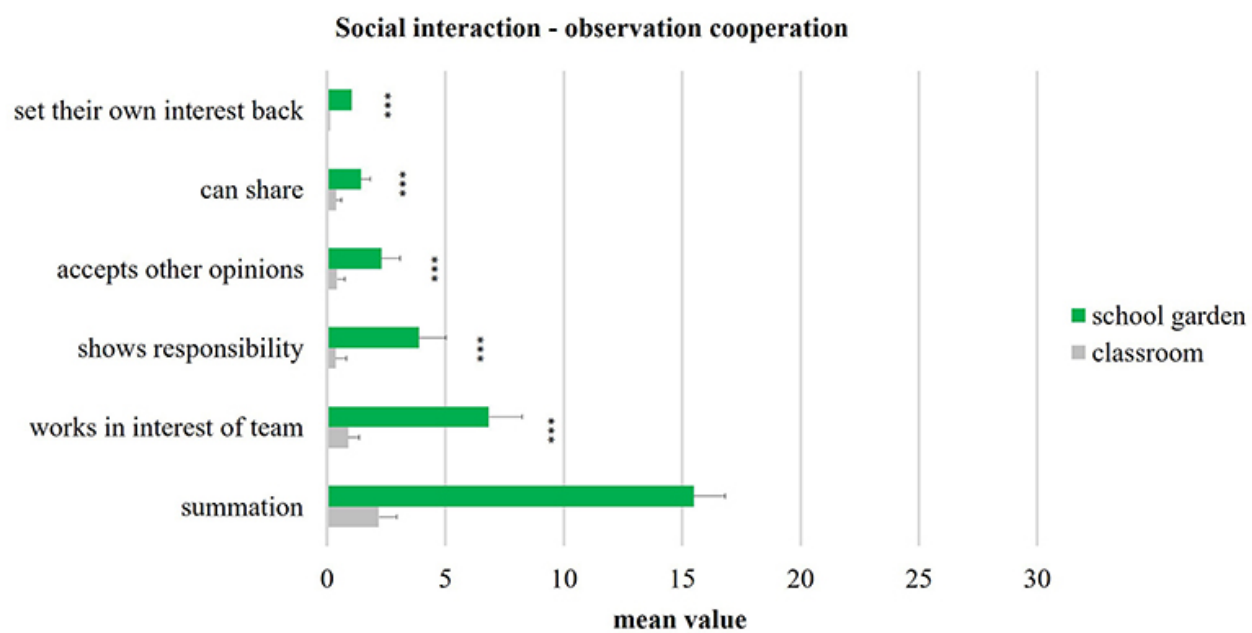
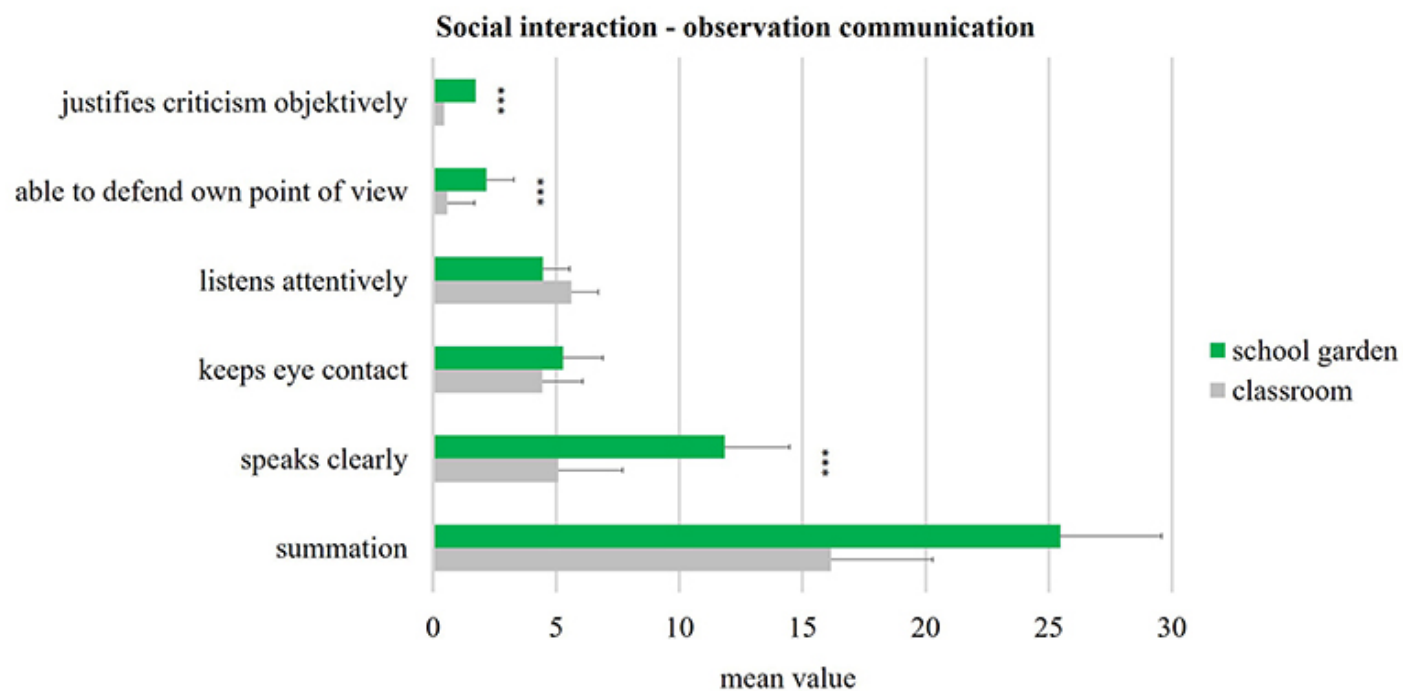
*Molly Deegan*  
*Hartford, Connecticut*

*Below are photos from ESM Garden, working with Lauren Little Edutainment and middle school students last spring and this fall, as part of the CT Grown for CT Kids Grant awardees 2022. I’ve also included graphs from the aforementioned study, which was published in the Journal of Environmental Psychology*

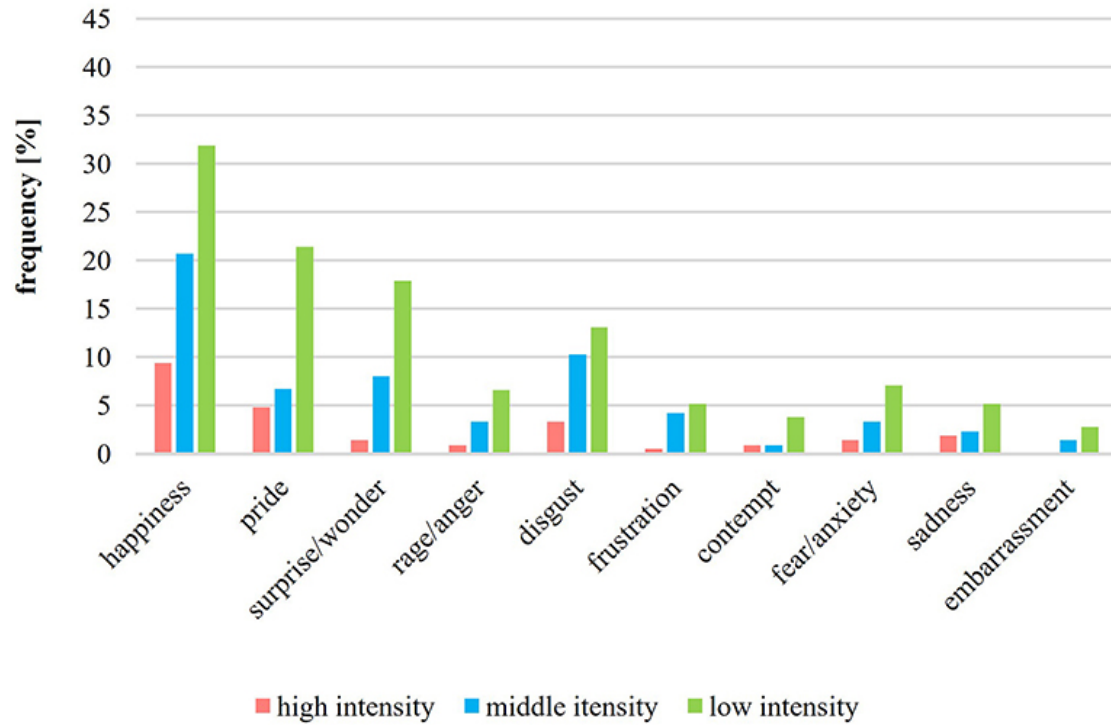
*in April 2021.*







### Classroom - Emotion



### School Garden - Emotion

